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- Home
- News
- Sports
- Features
- Entertainment
- Business
- Opinion
- Close-Up
- Obituaries
- Classifieds
- More Sites
- Help Desk

 [Print Article](#)  [Email Article](#)

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Avenues: Schools getting in shape

Salt Lake City School District plans ways to promote healthful lifestyles

By Tabatha Deans
Close-Up Staff

Salt Lake City School District students may have noticed a few changes this year - specifically in their schools' approach to nutrition and physical education.

In keeping with a federal mandate that requires all schools to create a wellness policy, the district has instituted policies geared towards helping students live healthier, more active lifestyles.

The district - it has 27 elementary schools, five middle schools and four high schools - recently issued a wellness policy that includes both nutritional education and physical activity.

"Our goal is to reinforce activity and encourage proper nutrition in schools and school activities," said Kelly Orton, district director of support services.

He said the policy was a combined effort of a committee that consisted of P. E. specialists, child nutrition specialists, school board members, parents and students. It met last fall to address the issues of the federal mandate, as well as health concerns regarding childhood obesity and lack of activity.

Elementary school students and their parents can expect two significant changes:



A vending machine at Rosecrest Elementary sells water and fruit juice (no soda pop or candy) and is only turned on before and after school. The move is part of a new Salt Lake City School District policy to encourage students to be more healthy. (Ryan Galbraith/The Salt Lake Tribune)

Physical-education instructors will become certified through the district, so recess and playground activities will be more structured and beneficial to students.

And food and/or physical activity will no longer be used as rewards or disciplines. Students will no longer be held indoors during recess as discipline or to finish assignments. And students won't receive treats as a reward for a job well done.

Students in middle schools can expect more involvement in physical activities, and their vending machines are now devoid of soda pop. Some machines have been replaced with those that dispense water and milk; others have had

their contents replaced with juice containers.

That's not all.

Vending-machine snacks must meet the "250 per serving" requirement. That means they can't exceed a 250-calorie portion, and the same applies for juice.

High school students won't notice much change this year or next, but the policy must be in place by July 2008.

Schools will also schedule recess before lunch. This could keep students from hurrying through their meal to spend more time on the playground.

Orton said healthful living choices are part of a combined effort between parents, communities and society as a whole, and he recognizes that the district's policy is a small part of their students' overall lifestyle.

"Getting healthy and staying active is a community

effort," Orton said. Parents and students need to get involved and make it a focus in their lives. These new guidelines will certainly help within the schools, but parental involvement is essential."

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Watch for it: Salt Lake City School District parents and students can expect to receive a flier outlining some of the P.E. and nutrition changes, including district recommendations, within the next two months. Policies can be viewed on the district Web site at <http://www.slc.k12.ut.us/>, under the "policies" category.

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